R E P O R T  R E S U M E S

ED 017 998 EA 001 197

WORKING WITH PARENTS, A GUIDE FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATORS.

NATIONAL SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSN., WASH.,D.C.
ASSOCIATION OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS, WASHINGTON,D.C.

PUB DATE 68

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC NOT AVAILABLE FROM EDRS. 41P.

DESCRIPTORS- PARENT ROLE, *TEACHER ROLE, *PUBLIC RELATIONS, ADMINISTRATOR ROLE, STUDENT ROLE, COMMUNICATION (THOUGHT TRANSFER), *STUDENT EVALUATION, ACHIEVEMENT, HOMEWORK, *PARENT TEACHER CONFERENCES, GUIDANCE COUNSELING, TESTS, HOME VISITS, SEX EDUCATION, TEACHER AIDES, PARENT STUDENT RELATIONSHIP, *PARENT SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP, PARENTAL GRIEVANCES, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA,

THIS GUIDE FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS IS BASED ON THE IDEA THAT EDUCATION IS A RESPONSIBILITY SHARED AMONG SCHOOL, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS. SUGGESTIONS ARE MADE FOR TEACHER FACILITATION OF GOOD STUDENT-PARENT-SCHOOL RELATIONS. AMONG THE PUBLIC RELATIONS PROBLEMS DISCUSSED ARE TEACHER INTRODUCTIONS TO STUDENT AND FAMILY, NOTES TO PARENTS, HOMEWORK, PARENTAL VISITS, HOME VISITS, PARENTAL COMPLAINTS, BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS, TESTING, AND SEX EDUCATION. THIS DOCUMENT IS AVAILABLE FOR $1.00 AS STOCK NO. 411-12718 FROM THE NATIONAL SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION, 1201 SIXTEENTH STREET, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036. (HM)

PROCESS WITH MICROFICHE AND PUBLISHER'S PRICES. MICRO-FICHE REPRODUCTION ONLY.

ED 071 796

# Working with Parents

A Guide for Classroom Teachers and Other Educators

PROCESS WITH MICROFICHE AND PUBLISHER'S PRICES. MICRO-FICHE REPRODUCTION ONLY.

# Working with Parents

A GUIDE FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATORS

Published by
National School Public Relations Association
in cooperation with the
Association of Classroom Teachers
Departments of the National Education Association

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Marylane Ginglng TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

*It Starts in the Classroom,* the public relations newsletter for classroom teachers, published by the National School Public Relations Association, for years has been gathering from school systems the success stories about school public relations techniques. A wide variety of these, dealing with the [redacted]-to-home relationship, have been drawn together and are included in *Working with Parents.*

Copyright 1968
National School Public Relations Association
a department of the National Education Association
1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Single copy, $1. Quantity orders: 2 to 9 copies, 90 cents each; 10 or more copies, 80 cents each. Stock No. 411-12718. Orders for $2 or less must be accompanied by payment. Postage free if prepaid. Address communications and make checks payable to the National School Public Relations Association, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Permission to reproduce this copyrighted work has been granted to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and to the organization operating under contract with the Office to Education to reproduce documents included in the ERIC system by means of microfiche only, but this right is not conferred to any users of the microfiche received from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Further reproduction of any part requires permission of the copyright owner.

# *Table of Contents*


**Front Line Interpreters, An Introduction** ..... 4

Public Relations Begins Inside the School

*Chapter 1* **First Impressions** ..... 7
Introducing Yourself
Face to Face—For the First Time
First Notes Home

*Chapter 2* **Pet Peeves of Parents** ..... 12
Parents Say . . .
Parents Ask . . .

*Chapter 3* **Homework—The Biggest Link** ..... 14
Some Homework Pain Killers
Should Parents Help?
Homework Booby Traps

*Chapter 4* **Putting It in Writing** ..... 19

*Chapter 5* **Parents Come to School** ..... 21
Guidance and Counseling
Talking About Behavior Problems
Telling Parents About Testing
Do's and Don'ts in Discussing Tests

*Chapter 6* **How About Home Visits?** ..... 29
Successful Home Visits
Telephoning the Home

*Chapter 7* **Touchy Subjects** ..... 33
Sex Education and Parent Protests
Some Do's and Don'ts

*Chapter 8* **A Helping Hand** ..... 37
Aides Help Bridge the Home-School Gap

*Chapter 9* **The Bigger Job** ..... 39
Developing Citizenship

# *Front-Line Interpreters*

## An Introduction

It's easy to discuss Susan with her parents. One of your best pupils, she is a happy, eager child who consistently earns high grades and is popular with her classmates. Susan thinks of learning as fun, and for her it is. But how do you advise Steven's parents that their son is having great difficulty in your class and is in danger of failing? What can you say when Martha's mother asks for a 25-words-or-less description of the "new math"? Or when Janice's mother demands to know why sex education has been added to the curriculum?

The school has sent out duplicated announcements about the first open house for parents, two weeks away. Is there anything you can do to encourage as many parents of your pupils to come as possible?

These are not unusual situations; they occur repeatedly in schools throughout the nation each year. At the same time, they are touchy because they demand responses from teachers that will reflect favorably upon the classroom and the school. Each classroom teacher becomes a front-line interpreter, building a foundation for public support of the school by developing a warm, strong relationship with the parents.

### Public Relations Begins Inside the School

Internal conditions must provide the kinds of encouragement and the opportunities necessary for public relations activities. If classroom teachers are to play a dominant role, they must feel that they are full-fledged partners in the educational enterprise.

School administrators are responsible for creating the all-important atmosphere in which public relations activities of classroom teachers can grow. They need to:

- Support teachers in their public relations efforts.
- Make certain that teachers have time for public relations responsibilities as an integral part of their daily schedule.
- Use paraprofessional people to free the teacher to make parent contacts.
- Provide telephone facilities that are private and convenient.
- Relieve teachers of some of the clerical work connected with contacting parents.
- Provide a suitable place for parent conferences to be held.
- Work to effect an understanding of district policies, practices, and problems.
- Provide inservice help as preparation for parent-teacher conferences.
- Promote public relations activities through the combined efforts of the school's staff.
- Recognize the accomplishments of individuals and groups.
- Give attention to the improvement of working conditions: reasonable work loads, adequate materials and equipment, attractive surroundings.
- Make information about the students, the school, and its programs easily accessible to the teachers.
- Recognize teachers as professionals.

The classroom teacher, given the encouragement, has the responsibility to acquire knowledge of the school system and to be able to discuss it intelligently with others; to keep his own differences with colleagues and practices strictly within the system; to be actively interested in community life; to become a student of attitudes and opinions regarding public education; and to work for good relations with students, parents, and other people in the community.

There is no formal preparation for working well with parents and with the community; there is no reward or penalty for those who do or don't.

But the teacher who shows that extra spark of interest in students and in teaching receives dividends that are too great to be measured. The teacher who accepts a responsibility for school public relations as part of his daily schedule finds his job greatly enriched.

Teachers who take the time to invest in sending a note of commendation, or in calling a parent to report a student's progress or lack of progress, are the first to admit that it pays to practice public relations.

Education is a shared responsibility, shared among the school, the teachers, and the parents. Each has a right to participate.

Working with people can be a gift, or knack, or an art to be learned. Parents are people.

That's what this book is all about.

CHAPTER 1

# *First Impressions*

The first school bell of September brings you face to face with its most influential segment—the children. "Much of the information and attitudes held by the general public are transmitted from pupil to parent to public on the community grapevine," say public relations authorities *Scott M. Cutlip and Allen H. Center in their book, Effective Public Relations.*[1] "There is no surer route to a person's heart—or resentment —than through his child."

Teachers can be certain that the initial impression they make upon the children will be their introduction to the parents and to the community. Needless to say, it should be a good one.

There are a few general rules which, if established from the start, will help to make first impressions both good and continuing ones. Assuming that the "product" is good—in other words, that what goes on in the classroom is developing the individual potential of each student —the following are basic skills the teacher needs to develop to get this fact across to parents and to the public. The classroom teacher who communicates most effectively will:

*Explain so others can understand.*

Though this sounds obvious, all too often, when dealing with parents, teachers assume understanding where it does not exist. There is the story of a woman, returning home from a school meeting who remarked: "That uppity Mrs. So-and-So thinks she knows so much. Over and over again she referred to the 'Intelligence Quota' of children . . . Imagine! Why everybody knows that IQ stands for 'Intelligence Quiz.' " Parents are often reluctant to admit that they don't understand. Sometimes they are afraid to ask questions that may make them seem stupid. The teacher should make sure that what he is saying is fully understood.

[1] Third edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964. 512 pp.

*Be tactful.*

Hurt feelings rarely contribute to good public relations. And parents often are supersensitive where their children are concerned. During parent-teacher conferences, it's wise to point out a child's good qualities while you are discussing his weaknesses and failures. This smooths the way and makes it more likely that parents will accept criticism of their child from you—an outsider. Avoid argument, for it only makes parents resentful and forces them to think of counter-arguments to bolster their side of the discussion.

*Be honest with parents, but not brutal.*

A teacher who would like to be completely honest and share the knowledge with a parent that his son is "lazy and uncooperative" will meet with more successful cooperation if he uses a hopeful and positive approach. He could say that the student being discussed "can do more when he tries" and "needs to learn to work with others." Parents are proud people and respond to positive evaluations of their child's habits.

*Keep written communications personal.*

There's nothing like a stiff, impersonal note from their child's teacher to make parents feel like outsiders. The teacher should try to communicate with parents as often as possible, and to keep notes friendly and informal. A personal note about the child's progress can take the coldness from printed report cards.

*Learn to listen.*

Listen with understanding, patience, and genuine interest when talking with parents. Try to put yourself in their shoes so you can figure out *why* as well as *what* they are saying.

**Introducing Yourself**

A parent's first impression of a teacher is made in many different ways—sometimes through a youngster's remark at the family dinner table: "Mrs. Bradley wears a bow in her hair. She smiled at me today."

Sometimes that first contact is through a message carried home in early September. It may be an impersonal dittoed announcement of a tea being held for parents—not very warm and maybe a little intimidating to a shy parent. Or it may be a cheery "I'm Mrs. Bradley, and I'm eager to meet you. Could you drop by the school for tea at 4 o'clock on Thursday?"

Parents can be rather shy. Schools and classroom teachers employ a variety of lures to bring them out of their homes and into their schools, where they will begin to help build that all-important bridge between home and school. Here are typical methods that have proved successful:

Mothers of seventh graders are invited to visit homerooms on the third Friday afternoon of the first month of school at a junior high school in Miami, Florida. They meet the homeroom teacher, other mothers, and other students who will be in the same homeroom with their children for three years.

First graders themselves helped prepare a booklet for new first graders and their parents in Waco (Texas) Independent School District. Beside each photograph of a school activity is a page of text in the children's own handwriting.

During the first or second week of school, parents of first graders in a New York community are invited by the teacher to an afternoon tea. Children are left at home with a neighbor or baby-sitter. The teacher explains what the first-grade program will be and how parents can help. She stresses the importance to the child of close cooperation between home and school. Materials used in the first grade are on display. Parents are encouraged to ask questions after the talk. The teacher then schedules an hour when each parent can come and observe his child at work in the group.

The Santa Barbara (Calif.) Board of Education grants eleven part-days during the school year to elementary teachers so that parent-teacher conferences can be held to report pupil progress. Arrangements are made with the recreation department for playground supervision on those days for children who cannot go home early and for children whose parents are participating in one of the parent-teacher conferences.

**Calling All Parents!**

Every elementary teacher in Midland Park, New Jersey, makes a personal phone call to parents of his pupils at the beginning of the school year. Object: to let parents know that the teachers are interested in each child and to share information about each child with his parents.

**Face to Face—For the First Time**

A meeting of the minds—that's what is hoped for in an individual teacher-parent conference. If teachers are a bit worried and fearful about those first meetings with individual parents, remember this: The parents feel dubious and nervous about the meeting, too. How can you ease the way for yourself, and for the parents? Here are some tips:

Plan ahead. Assemble the child's work in a folder. Jot down notes of his successes and failures.

Keep the coffee perking. Refeshments before or after the talk tend to relax the atmosphere.

In some neighborhoods, parents are shy about coming to private conferences. Try inviting parents of pupils in the same reading group to the same conference.

Take time to listen. You'll learn a lot about the child by letting the parents talk.

Show parents ways they can help their child overcome his learning problems.

Education is a cooperative venture between parents and teachers. Both must be aware of the other's willingness to share the responsibility.

**First Notes Home**

The teacher's only contact with some parents is the written word, a fact that makes that word even more important. Those messages, especially the first notes of the school year, which the teacher gives to each child to take home, have a big job to do. They must project the friendliness of the teacher's personality; they must inform the parents; they must show the parents that the teacher cares deeply about the children; and they must stir the parents to action and to involvement in helping the youngsters learn.

Here's how some teachers use the written word to make first, and lasting, sensible and solid impressions on parents:

Jaunty stick figures decorate a report sent to each parent by a fourth-grade teacher after the first five weeks of school. Each message is individualized, telling what the child has done well, and what he has been less successful in. Additional handwritten comments by the teacher often are included.

A teacher new to the school started the year off by sending parents a brief report about herself and a statement of her aims as a teacher.

Formal printed report cards may be so impersonal that they create a bad reaction in parents, especially if what they are reporting isn't a success story. Many teachers include a personal note with such cards. Others advise the parents, before report cards are distributed, if a child is doing poorly, with the suggestion that they stop in for a conference. A word of congratulation to parents of children who are doing well always strikes a happy note, and it couples the parents' natural pride with a sense of realizing that their child is growing up in the world of learning.

Many teachers send home folders of the children's work every week or month. This has greater impact when it includes a note from the teacher pointing out where the children are doing unusually well; e.g., "You'll notice that Jimmy's writing has improved since the last folder was sent home." Teachers who have taken the time to send home a note of commendation on a student's progress have discovered the power of a word of sincere praise. They have found that in most cases the student's interest in the subject matter increases. Students also are found to be interested in another taste of success. Such teachers find that it's worth the time it takes.

CHAPTER 2

# *Pet Peeves of Parents*

Many parents who have complaints about their child's teacher or school never express their complaints to school people. Unfortunately, whether their unvoiced "gripes" are real or fancied, these silent parents may often be the noisiest in airing their peeves to friends and neighbors —to the obvious detriment of the school.

Some of the complaints of parents who seldom speak up are listed below. They may give clues to similar sentiments of parents of your students—or some tip-offs to things you may be doing, hurriedly or unconsciously, that irritate parents, though they may never mention it.

**Parents Say . . .**

The thing I've reacted to most negatively in getting my family through school has been the teacher who talks in vague generalities or in academese and assumes—because nobody answers when he says "Any questions?"—that the parents know what he's talking about.

Vital information doesn't get to us parents far enough in advance. A decision was made, recently, to bus the children to another school. Information was given to me on Friday; the new system was to start on Monday. I hit the ceiling—right in front of my child. If I had known about the anticipated change and had time to think about it, I could have explained to him calmly why this new way was necessary. When major school policy changes are made, parents should be given time to absorb them before they go into action.

Rigid rules of large schools are hard on small children. For example, in our school, first graders aren't allowed to talk at all during their lunch period. They have only 20 minutes for lunch, and the theory is that talking would slow down their eating.

I don't understand teachers who don't or won't correct papers. My child reported to me that her teacher said, "I'm not paid for what I do at home!" The complaint may be valid, but her way of putting it was what I'd call poor public relations. I also feel strongly about English teachers who only teach grammar, instead of also encouraging reading, and teaching students how to read with more interest and understanding.

**Parents Ask . . .**

Why do teachers of the same grades have different homework policies? My third grader has a lot of homework; the youngster next door, in the same school but in a different third-grade room, has no homework.

Why don't schools explain to parents why their children are placed in accelerated classes or grouped in other ways?

Why don't the schools contact parents earlier in the school year? My fourth grader was in school nine weeks before we received a report card. We had no personal contact with the teacher for six weeks. More frequent communication between parent and teacher would be more helpful.

Why do teachers give pupils big projects to prepare—then neglect to inform parents that the finished project cannot be transported to school on the school bus? Since my husband and I both work, one of us had to take leave to take the project to school.

Why do teachers allow some parents to dominate group sessions? There are always some parents who do all the talking, and the teacher doesn't seem to know how to turn them off so others will have a chance.

Why is outdoor recess left to the decision of the individual teacher? If the teacher doesn't feel like taking the group outdoors, the children don't get the exercise and fresh air they need in the middle of their studies.

Why don't the schools make a bigger effort to inform parents that education must be done by parents as well as by teachers? I think it's up to the schools to tell parents, over and over again, about the part parents really must play in helping their children succeed in school.

Why don't inflexible teachers realize that they frighten children? I'm thinking of one who told my first grader, "If you don't have the right change, don't bring milk money."

CHAPTER 3

# *Homework—The Biggest Link*

The biggest continuing contact between the school and the home is the homework assignment. For this reason, it can be used positively or negatively as part of the school's public relations program.

The beginning of the school year is the time to examine carefully homework approaches and practices. The following criteria suggested by the Fresno (Calif.) City Unified School District outline some standards of good homework assignments:

- Does the homework serve a valid purpose?
- Is it well within the capabilities of the students?
- Has the class been thoughtfully motivated for the work?
- Does the assignment grow out of school experience?
- Is the work related to children's interests? Is it interesting?
- Does it extend children's fund of information?
- Is the work adapted to individual needs, interests, capacities?
- Are pupils entirely clear about what they are to do?
- Can they do the work without the help of parents or others?
- Is the assignment a reasonable one in view of pupils' home conditions?
- Does it minimize the temptation merely to copy information?
- Can it be evaluated fairly and/or be used in the daily program?

Realizing that the less parents understand about the school's homework practices and policies, the more likely they are to have strong negative feelings about their child's teacher and his homework assignments, many schools now distribute to parents folders on homework policy, with suggestions on how parents can and cannot help. Other ways schools and teachers communicate with parents about homework are:

Teachers in Laning Avenue School, Verona, New Jersey, are told to make a point of covering the subject of homework in their first conference with parents.

When the Hartford (Conn.) Board of Education distributed to parents a folder explaining homework policy, it enclosed a summary in Spanish for Spanish-speaking parents.

A panel made up of two teachers and two parents, moderated by the principal, gave everyone a chance to air his questions about homework during a PTA meeting at Mark Twain School, Thompsonville, Connecticut. Parents were asked to submit their questions on slips of paper. Some concrete suggestions on homework were offered, and the policy of the school was understood better as a result of this discussion.

Students, parents, and teachers were all given a chance to sound off and give their points of view about homework in an edition of the Norfolk (Va.) County Schools' newspaper, which devoted an entire issue to that subject.

To keep parents "in the know" and up to date on their children's homework schedules, a mimeographed sheet containing the pupil's entire assignment for the week was prepared by St. Mary's School, Closter, New Jersey. Each child received this sheet on Monday. The mimeographed sheet later developed into a monthly homework calendar, with space by each date where the homework assignment could be inserted. Thus parents knew exactly what and how much homework their child would have every day of the month.

A one-page questionnaire is sent to parents of children in Mitchell Elementary School, Gadsden, Alabama, to find out parent and child attitudes toward the school in general—but particularly about homework; whether the parents help with it, how much time is spent on it, whether the parent is for or against it. The questionnaire requires no parent signature. A space is left for remarks. This survey is so helpful to the school staff that it is made every five years.

## Some Homework Pain Killers

Parents' homework headaches can do more harm to a school's public relations than almost any other aspect of the school program. Anything that teachers and administrators can do to ease those headaches—without slowing down student progress in learning, of course—is practical and worthwhile public relations.

There is no miracle drug that will take all the parent pangs out of homework assignments. However, it helps if the teacher keeps the following thoughts in mind:

Try to plan the assignment so that the child *wants* to do it, rather than expecting his parents to force him to do it.

Be sure that the child understands the material and method he is to study or practice. Remember that homework should be independent study, not parent teaching or a test of parent literacy.

Never use homework assignments for punishment. Such assignments may result in learning, but often it will be learning to dislike homework and study. This may also result in lack of respect for the teacher from the pupil's parents.

Make assignments compatible with the child's intelligence and maturity. They should never appear to be a hopeless task to him. His parents will either push him to do the work which is beyond his ability, or they'll become just as frustrated and resentful as he is that his assignment was unrealistic.

Never give more homework than you can check or grade. Students and parents deeply resent it when much of the assignment, worked on so carefully, is neither marked nor acknowledged by the teacher.

Remember that students study and produce homework assignments at different rates of speed. A paper that may take a half hour for one youngster to complete may take another student an hour and a half of home study time.

## Should Parents Help?

One of the most touchy homework questions is whether parents should actually help their children with their homework, and if so, how? It would be helpful if teachers gave parents some of the following advice (it could be provided during teacher-parent meetings and/or sent home on a mimeographed sheet):

The parent who does a student's homework for him is contributing about

as much to the youngster's intellectual growth as eating his dinner for him would add to his physical growth.

When a parent does the lion's share of the assignment, the teacher will be evaluating the parent's work rather than the student's, and will have difficulty determining the student's strengths and weaknesses.

The parent must remember that, when his child takes classroom tests and end-of-term exams, the parent will not be there to help.

When and if help is given, the parent must be alert for clues. When the child seems to object to this help, or becomes upset, the time has come to stop. When the help turns into a struggle or argument between parent and child, the help becomes a hindrance. It is hard for a parent to help his child with homework because the parent-child relationship is often charged with emotion.

Before helping a young child with his reading, the parent should find out what methods the school is using. The child becomes confused and anxious when parents use techniques different from those used by his teacher or techniques he may not be ready for.

Ways of teaching many subjects, such as math and science, have changed in the last few decades. Parents who "help" by outmoded methods may create a conflict between school and home and between the child and his teacher.

Here are some ways parents can safely give assistance: help find books and other research material; read aloud words to be spelled; double-check learning of a vocabulary list.

Parents can help by asking their child to tell them what he remembers from a history chapter or other reading assignment. This helps him to clarify his thinking and to keep the most important points in his mind.

**Homework Booby Traps**

Sometimes, with the best intentions, teachers will give homework assignments that have built-in public relations booby traps. For example:

It is especially important at the secondary school level that research resources are available for all students. An assignment to write a review of a certain Hemingway novel, for example, can deplete the local libraries' shelves in one evening. Result: unhappy students—and librarians who wish they had been given advance warning—or wished the teacher had suggested that some students purchase paperback copies.

An assignment to interview or write letters to public figures should be given only after careful preparation and planning with the students on what they will ask. (How would you like to receive 30 letters saying, "Please tell me everything about politics. I'm doing a report for my class"?)

Some assignments result in youngsters' destroying public property by taking pages from library books, library copies of magazines, and the like. Students should receive instruction about how to use their public libraries for help in their homework and how to behave when doing library research.

Assignments should be avoided that result in large numbers of students telephoning a local source, such as a newspaper or post office, for information.

All students do not have the same sources of research in their homes. An "overnight" assignment that calls for research in an encyclopedia may pose a serious problem to a student who does not live near a library and has no encyclopedia in his home. It gives an unfair advantage to students who do have such resources close at hand.

CHAPTER 4

# *Putting It in Writing*

Whether teachers simply write an occasional dittoed letter to parents, are involved in putting out a classroom newsletter, or are asked to contribute news stories for the school newspaper—it is helpful to assess what is being done and how.

Do keep parent letters chatty, informal, short, and friendly.

Do look for ways to make parent letters more effective. For example, one teacher encloses a photocopy of a snapshot of herself in the first parent note of the year. Another encloses a Polaroid shot of the child in each parent letter—and promises to enclose another at the end of the year to show how he has grown.

Do consider sending—instead of or with report cards—handwritten personal notes about each student's progress and achievement during the reporting period. One teacher writes personal notes of congratulations to parents of children who do outstanding work.

Do let an informational leaflet ride along with the note or report card. Parents would enjoy receiving, in the spring, a list of books that would make suitable summer reading for their children.

Don't allow slipshod typing or weakly printed, hard-to-read duplicated material go out bearing your school's name. It gives an impression of carelessness and inefficiency.

Don't stick to one approach or format just because it's always been that way. Maybe that newsletter needs a new face, or that school system newspaper could use a new photo feature. If it's always been done a certain way, chances are it's time for a change that will jolt the reader and get his attention.

Do take a critical look at the school's student handbook. It it stodgy-looking, lacking in pep, loaded with pedagese? Why not suggest a brand new bright-eyed edition, in keeping with the times? If the handbook looks stuffy and dated, parents may think the school is, too.

Don't forget to look for news stories. Develop a format for remembering them: at the end of each school day, jot down that amusing anecdote, the funny thing Melinda said, the new game you thought of for teaching reading. At the end of the week, hand these notes to the school public relations specialist or to the editor of the school newspaper.

**The Personal Touch**

A warm personal note of praise makes a parent's heart swell with pride. At the Madison, Connecticut, schools, teachers wrote letters to parents of children who had done very well or had shown improvement. Emphasis was placed on the pupil's own initiative and energy, rather than giving credit to the teachers or administration. Here's how one letter was worded:

"Alan has just completed a very successful six-weeks period in Algebra II. His effort picked up, and it was quite obvious in his performance. If he continues with the same determination, he could turn in a good year's average in the course. He is to be congratulated and encouraged."

Report cards can be stiff, formal "notices" of a child's classroom performance or personalized, friendly messages linking the parent and teacher in a common concern for the pupil's progress. One example of the latter variety was a three-page letter which took the place of the first report card for parents of first graders in an Indianapolis school. It included a Parents' Page, with suggestions to parents entitled "What Can You Do for Your Child?" Another page constituted an informal pupil-teacher cooperative appraisal sheet covering the child's first six weeks in school. The third page contained a letter to the parents explaining why this type of report was being used. It included a tear-off slip at the bottom for parents to sign, write their comments, and return to the school. More than 85 percent sent comments praising this kind of report.

CHAPTER 5

# *Parents Come to School*

Parents come to school with mixed emotions. Many of them have a hard time saying what they really think and feel, are extremely defensive, and feel ill at ease and inadequate when talking to the figure of authority—the teacher. The following methods have proved successful in easing strain on parents and in building real communication between parent and teacher:

The situation is warmer and easier when the teacher sits away from his desk (the symbol of authority or position). Parents can also be put at ease if the meeting takes place in a small conference room rather than a classroom, if possible. If such a room is not available, the teacher could arrange chairs at the back of the room for a more informal setting.

Don't rush the interview. It will probably take time for parents to relax, tell what they are really worried about, and express their real feelings and fears.

Be willing to agree with parents whenever possible. When the answer must be "No," take a long time to say it, and say it softly, without hostility. When there is agreement on a hundred small things, it is easier for both parent and teacher to state their differences frankly if a difference of opinion does exist.

Listen with enthusiasm. Parents should be encouraged to do the talking, telling, and suggestion making. Give parents a chance to "sound off," especially if they are angry or upset. After they have let off steam, you will find it easier to discuss the problem calmly. Try not to argue with them. Control your facial expressions of disapproval or anger. A wince or frown at a parent's comment or revelation may embarrass him or put him on guard.

Examine your own emotional reaction to criticism. Do you dislike people who give you new ideas, or who disagree with you? If so, you may be getting this message across in subtle, unspoken ways.

Decide in advance what is to be discussed during the parent conference. Assemble a folder of the student's work and jot down a checklist of the various problems to talk about.

Use the simplest and clearest words you can find to explain what you and their child do in school. Gear your talk to the parents' interests and avoid pedagese at all costs. At the same time, don't talk down to parents. They are not children, and they resent being treated as such.

Don't let comments about other children creep into the conversation. Avoid making comparisons with the student's brothers and sisters, or with his classmates.

Provide parents with at least one action step—one thing they can do at home to help their child overcome a particular problem you've been discussing. Help them understand that their child's success in school must be a joint project of home and school.

Begin and end the conference with a positive and encouraging comment about the child and his school activities.

Don't take notes while talking with parents. They may feel intimidated and afraid to speak up.

Don't forget the follow-up. The first step is to write down the gist of what was discussed, so you won't forget it when writing the child's next report card or when preparing for the next parent conference.

**Guidance and Counseling**

Every classroom teacher is deeply involved in the guidance and counseling process, whether his school has counseling specialists or not. "The most vital role in the guidance program is played by the classroom teacher," says *Pasadena (Calif.) Schools in Action*. "The teacher is with the student longer than any other person in the school situation, and knows him best. . . . Because of the close teacher-pupil relationship, it is often the teacher whom the student contacts first as he seeks an answer to his question or problem."

Guidance involves as well the sensitive areas of student personality and development, which present potential communication problems. A major hurdle each teacher faces in his role as guidance counselor is overcoming parents' confusion about what guidance actually is.

A major ground rule for the teacher is to remember that parents are sensitive—sometimes overly so—where their children are concerned. It's difficult to have to tell a high-pressure, status-conscious parent that his child would be happier in a technical school than in college, or to inform a parent, no matter how gently, that his child is showing signs of emotional disturbance. In such cases, parents are apt to suggest (and not always gently) that you stick to teaching subject matter and leave decisions about their child's future and emotional stability to them. Even if they don't say this, they may be thinking it.

Such negative reactions are not so likely to occur if parents are given a little counseling about counseling.

It helps if parents realize that their child is not being singled out for this attention and criticism, but that all students receive personal direction and advice.

It helps if they understand that guidance is not a matter of prying by the teacher into the family's role in bringing up their child but it is instead a special kind of caring.

Teachers and schools use a variety of ways to inform parents about guidance and counseling.

Parent meetings were conducted by a guidance counselor at Leland P. Wilson Junior High School, Windsor, Connecticut, during which an explanation of guidance and counseling was given, and problems common to junior high school students were discussed. A film about the overindulged child was shown.

*How Is Your Child Counseled?* is the title of a publication of the Champaign (Ill.) PTA Council. It points out that counseling is part of the daily life of every elementary teacher and principal, showing how they observe and evaluate student learning and behavior—and why. It explains that the teacher asks for help from the visiting counselor, psychologist, and other consultants when necessary.

"What is the parent's relationship to the guidance program?" asks a special publication on guidance distributed by the Hayward (Calif.) Union High School District. Here's how it describes that relationship: "The school's guidance program is designed to supplement and complement the guidance offered by parents to their children. It cannot and is not intended to take the place of the parent. It is the hope of the school that every parent will be completely informed on the guidance program, will initiate many contacts with the school." It answers such questions as: Why is a guidance program necessary? What is a guidance program? It also offers the following suggestions to parents:

"Keep in close contact with your student's counselor.

**After Hours**

The guidance department at Freehold (N.J.) High School is kept open one evening every month for parents who find it difficult to get to the school during regular hours.

"Try to be as objective and realistic as possible in forming opinions about your child's ability and interests.

"It is better not to force your desires for your child on him if they are not shared by him. He should make his own decisions.

"If at all possible, attend all parent meetings; study your parents' handbook; read all communications from the school carefully; never hesitate to call the school.

"Check dates when report cards and test scores are issued and when planning for next year's program is to be done. Discuss these with your child.

"Attend special events such as Career Night and College Night."

Also: Open-House Nights can schedule time for a teacher or counseling specialist to explain the function of guidance and counseling in today's school; Spring Roundup of "new parents" should include some indoctrination on the fact that counseling and guidance start when the child enters school.

**Talking About Behavior Problems**

Some parents will always be a hindrance to teachers who are trying to discipline their children. Others, once they are made aware of the problem, diplomatically, are eager to cooperate. The word "diplomatically" cannot be overstressed. Parents who must be told that their child has been a behavior problem in school are naturally upset. Some are extremely defensive and refuse to believe it. Others go to the opposite extreme and assure the teacher that they will go right home and punish the youngster. In either case, a little parent education is in order. Here are some tips from teachers who have conducted such parent conferences:

Keep the atmosphere pleasant and friendly.

Don't condemn the child or appear to be passing judgment; instead, be critical of the child's acts and try to find his reasons for doing them.

When seeking the reasons behind the child's misbehavior, try not to reproach the parents. Even if they have made mistakes, try to avoid "blaming" them for his actions. Instead, suggest mutual action by yourself and the parents to help the child improve his behavior.

If you feel that the child is emotionally disturbed or for any reason too much for you to handle, ask a guidance counselor or school psychologist to sit in on the conference.

Call parents' attention to the child's good points to relieve and reassure them. However, if his misbehavior is serious, don't make the mistake of underestimating its dangers and what it can do to him as a person.

Ask questions: How does he spend his spare time at home? Does he get along well with other children and with his brothers and sisters?

**'School Casework' Booklet**

A brief folder for parents of children with behavioral or emotional problems has been distributed by the Tucson (Ariz.) Public Schools. It describes symptoms which may have been reported to the parents by the school personnel or observed by parents at home. It then points out how the school caseworker can help. It is titled "School Casework: A Message to Parents."

**Telling Parents About Testing**

How good is my child in school? Is he college material? Does he have a high IQ? Will he have good enough marks to get into the college of his choice? Today's parents don't start asking themselves questions like these when their child is in seventh or eighth grade; they begin to push the panic button when he's in kindergarten. That is why teachers touch a supersensitive area when they talk to parents about tests their child is taking, particularly tests that measure his abilities, aptitudes, and IQ.

What teachers tell parents and students about intelligence tests can have an enormous impact on a school's public relations. One columnist reported that he receives a continuing stream of letters from worried parents and students who have been told "the bad news" about a low IQ test score. Parents still tend to regard the results of an intelligence test with the finality of a medical test, although, as the columnist pointed out, IQ's are not the be-all and end-all of education. Specialists in the learning process have long recognized the limitations of the IQ, and this

fact should be pointed out to parents of children with high IQ's as well as those with lower IQ's.

The best approach in handling parent questions about testing is to answer them as fully and as understandably as you possibly can. The following are some answers to questions teachers encounter during individual conferences with parents who are concerned—perhaps even frightened or angry—about tests their children are taking. They were adapted from "Standardized Tests—Good or Bad?" a message to parents from the Suffolk (Va.) City Schools.

*What is a standardized test?*

A standardized test is a means of obtaining a sample of what a person is like or what he is doing at a particular time. Just as a doctor takes a sample of blood to determine the condition of all blood, so a school takes a sample of a pupil's ability in order to evaluate or appraise the nature and quality of his various abilities. These tests have been checked for validity and reliability by trying them out on thousands of pupils in order to obtain scores for typical pupils of various ages. The results can therefore usually be relied upon as strongly indicative of potential ability. Because of the careful processes used in developing and refining the tests, they are called "standardized tests."

*What is meant by a scholastic ability test?*

These tests are designed to evaluate your child's ability to learn from school programs and experiences. It is from such a test that the IQ, or intelligence quotient, is derived. The IQ is not an exact measure of a child's mental capacity; rather it is a rough indication of his potential. It is not precise, and should not be used as if it were. It is an approximation of the mental capacity of a child compared to the mental capacities of other children who have taken the same test under the same conditions.

*What does the IQ test not measure?*

It does not measure some of the qualities educators have found to be extremely important in the development of complete individuals: character—the willingness to assume social and personal obligations, to work, and to persevere in that work until it is completed; creativity—the ability and imagination to perform creatively; social adjustment—readiness to meet people and the ability to lead and influence them in meaningful activities; health and physical stamina; and manual skills.

*What are achievement tests for?*

They measure the progress or lack of progress of your child in a particular subject. They answer such questions about your child as: Can he do simple problems in arithmetic? Does he read with reasonable speed and accuracy? Has he learned as much as he should for his particular age and grade?

*What do aptitude tests measure?*

An aptitude test attempts to forecast the possible success or failure of your child in a particular subject or field of work. It is used to identify those areas in which he is weak or strong, to help him obtain a realistic picture of himself in regard to what he can do. It is not intended to discourage him, but to help him understand the requirements of a vocation or career. After all, it would be a tragic waste to invest thousands of dollars and thousands of hours of your child's time in musical training if he has no aptitude for music.

*Are tests the only way to find these things out?*

The answer is an unqualified "No." Tests have many limitations as well as many uses. Only by combining all the factors in a child's school life, home life, and personal makeup can educators reach reasonably valid answers.

**The Big Question**

Should parents be told their children's IQ's?

Schools have found that the quickest and surest way to damage a good testing program (and damage its public relations) is to give out test scores promiscuously. It is infinitely better for all concerned if parents can be satisfied in learning the general classification in which their child's abilities fall—able, above normal, normal, slow, or retarded.

When exact scores are given, parents often have an unfortunate tendency to use high scores as status symbols and to use low scores improperly as excuses for defeat.

Adapted from "Let's Talk About . . . IQ"
Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools

**Do's and Don'ts in Discussing Tests**

*Do stress the positive.* If a boy's aptitude test reveals low aptitude for academic learning but high mechanical skill, talk to his parents about the mechanical ability first.

*Don't argue.* If parents refuse to believe a test result that is upsetting to them and to their high expectations for their child, respond in the following vein: "You may be right. Test results are not final, and Johnny's interest and skill in reading may well improve if you and I work together to help him. Don't forget that his mechanical ability is very high. Let's see if we can interest him in reading books about automobiles—a subject he wants to know more about."

*Do point out the weaknesses as well as the values of standardized tests*—the fact that they are not infallible indicators of a child's future success or failure.

*Do make sure that parents understand* what you are saying. Avoid use of terms that are probably unknown to them: commercial names of the various tests, and such phrases as "cumulative records," and "student norms." The fact that they don't ask what you mean by such terms does not indicate that they understand them. Chances are they are reluctant to admit they don't know.

*Don't overpower parents with too much information at one time.* Remember, most of what you'll be saying will be new to them, and will take time for them to digest.

CHAPTER 6

# *How About Home Visits?*

Home visits once were widely used by teachers in maintaining parent relationships. The tremendous changes in many communities resulting from urbanization, rural consolidation, expressways, and buses have made the home visit increasingly difficult to achieve.

Over the years, visits have been effective first steps toward involving parents in the child's learning activities and progress. They also help teachers to discover situations and attitudes in the home that affect the child's ability to learn.

A home visit is not as simple as it sounds in many situations. Stepping into the personal lives of the children and their parents presents possible problem situations. In many cases, such visits are appreciated by the parents, who feel they show that the teacher really cares about them and their children. However, a poorly handled visit can leave a parent with negative feelings about the school and the teacher.

Parents sometimes feel that a visit from the teacher is an invasion of their privacy. Some feel that the teacher is "snooping." Parents become upset—and rightfully so—when a teacher just drops in, unannounced. Some, particularly the economically disadvantaged, sometimes feel they are looked down upon by the teacher.

How can a teacher avoid producing these unhappy reactions and point up that the reason for being there is just the opposite? How can a teacher establish a feeling of friendliness and rapport with the parents of the pupils? Teachers who utilize home visits regularly make the following suggestions:

Always make an appointment with the parents. Contact them by phone or letter, asking them to name a convenient time.

Do not stare. Don't ask questions they may interpret as prying or make suggestions about the home setting—much as you would like to be helpful. A home economics teacher who makes about 130 home visits a year says, "If a hog walks through the parlor, pet it (one did and I did—almost!)."

Do not overdress; lower income mothers, especially, resent it.

Take along something positive to discuss about the child. Try not to discuss his failings or weaknesses during the initial visit. Disadvantaged parents are all too accustomed to considering any contact with school people as bringing "bad news" about their child.

Don't stay too long. A short visit, about 20 minutes, is best. You'll leave them wanting more and they'll be eager to have you return.

**Successful Home Visits**

The following advantages of home visits have been reported by a home economics teacher at Anna-Jonesboro High School in Anna, Illinois. She says that she finds out which girls cannot afford extra money for a field trip, which girls need to buy low-cost but good quality fabric, and which ones need extra encouragement because they get little at home. "I also learn about poor eyesight, or some physical impairment that the student will not mention but which could have affected her work and her grades. I always ask the parents to visit the school, and I make it clear that the superintendent also welcomes them. I schedule my visits with the girls at school. I suggest a date when I will be in the neighborhood and ask the girl to obtain home approval. If this date is not convenient for the mother, it is scheduled at a time she suggests—even if it is Saturday, Sunday, or at night."

At the end of each semester, teachers at Mt. View Elementary School, Marietta, Georgia, give the principal the names of families they have visited. A discussion is held on the results of each visit. The visits are usually made to homes where there is a lack of communication between the parents and the school.

In the first month of school, first graders at Poinciana Elementary School in Key West, Florida, are dismissed for one-half day so teachers can visit their homes. Guidance teachers do home visitation for the other grades.

A home economics teacher in Carbondale, Illinois, while making home visits, is careful to explain to mothers that, although their daughters may bring home new ideas for cooking or home decoration, this does not mean that the parents must change—that there are many ways of doing things.

Home visits to families of the disadvantaged in Cashtown, Pennsylvania, have been more successful since the school nurse has made the initial contact, says the principal of Franklin Township Elementary School. The school nurse, wearing her uniform and aware of the home situation, finds a responsive and eager parent awaiting her. Parents of underprivileged children usually want to talk to someone about school problems, and they'll accept the school nurse.

Home visits before school opens in the fall are a regular, accepted practice in the Fairfield (Iowa) Community School District. Appointments are not made in advance, but parents are aware of visitation days through newspaper and radio publicity. Parents and children look forward to this visit. Teachers say the practice is most profitable, and want it continued. A citizens study committee considered the home visitations one of the most important features of the home-school relationship.

**A Good Excuse**

Sometimes a special reason for making a home visit smooths the way, according to a third-grade teacher at Greiffenstein School, Wichita, Kansas. She recommends: "Watch for opportunities. Soon, some child will tell you something like this: 'We have some new puppies at our house.' You can then say, 'Isn't that wonderful? May I go home with you soon, some day after school? I want to see your puppies. Won't you ask your mother if I can come and see them—and when I can come?' These visits—so casual and friendly—are ideal for good home-school relations, as they lay a groundwork for other visits if problems arise during the term."

**Telephoning the Home**

A fourth-grade teacher in the Polk Street School, Franklin Square, New York, has found the telephone to be an easy and effective means of communication with parents. She comments: "It is impossible to ask for a conference every time lessons are not done, books are purposely mislaid, or wild tales told to explain why work isn't done. A brief, friendly call to Johnny's mother at home works wonders." Sometimes families are too concerned, over-anxious, or emotionally involved with a child. The same teacher has found that such parents are calmed and helped by being given the teacher's home phone number, and told to feel free to call when home-school problems occur. When Johnny knows that his problems, untruths, or misbehavior may be discussed that night by a direct phone call, work and behavior tend to improve.

"We talked with each parent by telephone in order to secure a date and time for home visitation," say two first-grade teachers at Henry A. Hunt Elementary School in Macon, Georgia. "This made for a pleasant reception in the homes of the parents. The telephone conversations established a friendly relationship, so the home visit took place in a cordial atmosphere of mutual understanding. Children who did not have telephones were given written messages to take to their parents, requesting the same information for home visits. It appears that parents know we come to make friends and to discover facts to help their children."

CHAPTER 7

# *Touchy Subjects*

What is a touchy subject? It is a topic or problem on which there are strong differences of opinion. It is a subject which, when discussed or studied in the classroom, may set a match to explosive feelings on the part of parents and among some organized community groups. The touchiness of subjects varies from locale to locale and from time to time. A topic such as sex education, Communism, civil rights, or religion may, in your community, be a potential tinderbox, if the public relations aspects of teaching it are not handled skillfully and with understanding.

Why teach such a subject if it is loaded with public relations problems? First, because sex education and other controversial topics are often impossible to avoid. They enter into classroom discussion of other subjects. The exploration of controversial issues gives students deeper understanding of the topics being studied and also gives them valuable experience in:

- Dealing with issues that are unresolved;
- Exchanging ideas with those who may disagree with the student's beliefs;
- Keeping the channels of communication open among those who disagree;
- Developing a dispassionate and factual approach to the analysis of controversial issues;
- Appreciating and respecting opinions and values different from their own.

This rationale for teaching, say, sex education, must be made clear to parents. It is never necessary, and it is genuinely wasteful, for a well

planned curriculum offering in a controversial area to disintegrate into a community scandal or to fall apart from lack of public support.

**Sex Education and Parent Protests**

Even though parents today are deeply concerned about their children's sex knowledge and behavior, some of them rise in righteous anger when sex education becomes part of the school curriculum. How are teachers and other school personnel to cope with these parent protests? Schools that have introduced sex education into their programs have found good planning to be essential to good public relations. Helen Manley, executive director of the Social Health Association of Greater St. Louis, says that two policies cannot be overemphasized: the community must be ready for whatever program is initiated, and the parents must be kept informed continually.

Parents should be invited to view the films, books, and other teaching materials which the students will use, and should know exactly what is going on. This gives them the opportunity to make suggestions and dispels fears and doubts. It also helps them correlate the home and school information. A "citizen faculty" or advisory committee, involved in every stage of planning the sex education program, can be a strong force in quieting parent protests.

A panel discussion for the public was held in Adams Center (N.Y.) Central School District as part of a carefully planned program of sex education. The panel was made up of three students, three parents, a moderator, and an experienced family counselor. The nurse and the school physician, who gave the course, reported that they picked up many points from the discussion, were able to reassure parents, and learned student reactions to the course. When one worried parent asked: "Didn't the course increase youngsters' interest in sex instead of decreasing it?" a student replied, "I don't think so. Most of us are less sex conscious now. We have a more balanced view." Another student commented, "I don't hear as many smutty jokes around the lockers as I used to," and the family counselor replied, "That's because people don't make fun of facts . . . they accept sex as a normal part of life after they've learned about it in a wholesome way." One parent reported that his family felt closer together as a family as a result of the course.

In spite of the most careful preparation, some parents and citizens who do not understand the program, or whose personal attitudes are warped, may complain or may try to sabotage the program. When this occurs, the teacher or administrator can give the parent an opportunity to sound off in a personal conference. He can explain to the parent how important it is for the child to know all the facts rather than face life's problems blindfolded. He can encourage the parent to attend a meeting of the citizen advisory council—where he will see for himself that other parents approve of the program. If all these methods fail, the children of protesting parents can be excused from the sex education program.

**Some Do's and Don'ts**

Free discussion of current topics is the heart and soul of the democratic process. Teachers must be free to discuss controversial issues and to teach the skills needed for intelligent study of issues, says the NEA Commission on Professional Rights and Responsibilities. Yet it is important to establish some ground rules for exploration of subjects that, unless taught with skill, can become too hot to handle. Here are several approaches that have proved successful:

Select a topic that is within the emotional and intellectual capacities of the class.

Show consideration for the feelings of the students; when feelings run high, stop the discussion and continue it another time.

When tension threatens, tact is more effective than the encouragement of open conflict; however, there may be times when a resolute stand

on the part of the teacher supports the cause of open and realistic study of a problem.

Involve the students themselves in establishing some of the rules for class study of touchy subjects. For example, when presenting facts, sources should be cited—no name calling should be allowed—no one person should be allowed to dominate the discussion.

See that all sides of the subject are fairly presented.

Help the students to separate fact from opinion.

Don't allow students (or yourself) to generalize on insufficient data.

Provide adequate and appropriate materials for the presentation of all points of view, and encourage the students to read widely on the subject and bring to class reports of what they have read.

Allow adequate time to develop the topic effectively.

Employ such techniques as role playing, case studies, debate, panel discussion, problem solving.

Encourage students to come to some conclusion on the issue, after all sides have been fairly presented and fully discussed. Open-mindedness and willingness to change a conclusion, however, should be recognized by the students as essential to critical thinking.

Avoid the temptation to indoctrinate students with your own philosophy. You should feel free, when asked, however, to state your own opinions, as long as you clearly identify them as such.

Establish a classroom climate conducive to freedom of expression on all topics, not just on controversial ones. If students are accustomed to open discussion and are not afraid to express their opinions on other subjects, they will be more comfortable when touchy subjects are tackled.

CHAPTER 8

# *A Helping Hand*

Increasing numbers of classroom teachers now have part-time help. Interns, student teachers, and substitute teachers are giving professional assistance. Teacher aides and parent volunteers are performing a wide variety of tasks which free the classroom teacher for more time to plan and teach. Whatever are the duties of the individuals who make up the teacher's "staff," it is important to realize that these individuals are pouring into the nation's classrooms by the thousands.

If there isn't one or more of these people in your classroom this year, chances are there soon will be. They will form a new pipeline from the school into the community; consequently, teachers will find their cooperative work extremely important from the public relations standpoint. Many of these people have not been in a public school since the day they graduated. Many are parents of children in the school system. Many are "indigenous personnel," men and women who live in the community of the children they're working with. The things they tell their friends and neighbors about the school and the teachers can either win over those who feel negatively about schools, or alienate them further.

## Aides Help Bridge the Home-School Gap

Teacher aides can, in many ways, help the teacher establish good relationships with parents:

A school in downtown New York City employs Chinese-speaking mothers to work with students who have immigrated recently from Hong Kong and Spanish-speaking mothers to work with Puerto Rican youngsters who speak little English. In addition to helping the students learn, this also helps the parents understand what the schools are trying to do, and why.

A social-work aide in Tucson, Arizona, visits Indian hogans, where he talks with parents about the school's interest in them and their children, and explains why he hopes the parents can meet the teacher. He then describes the parents and home to the teacher, arranges for a time the teacher can visit, and accompanies him.

Some schools train indigenous poor people as contact agents between the school and the home. In one school they have become intermediaries with whom parents talk before seeing the teacher or principal. They have also done some home visiting. The personal backgrounds of these aides, who live in the same neighborhood and come from the same socioeconomic background as the parents, enable them to explain and interpret home problems to the teachers. Their new experience in school and their new school training make it possible for them to explain the school and teacher to the parents.

In some school systems, parents who have time to spare help the teachers in a number of ways: they salvage stories and pictures from old textbooks; make word-picture cards, parts-of-speech and number charts, posters and bulletin-board displays. They process new books, repair old ones, check them in and out; cut and duplicate stencils requested by teachers for classroom use at all levels. Last year, in one small school district, parents gave 2,000 hours in which they made 1,800 items. There is reason to believe that these parents have formed a large reservoir of support for curriculum innovations.

Mothers serve as librarians at the A. D. Crossman Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana. They repair accession books and make up the card catalogs and shelf lists. In this way, the mothers know what children are reading in class. Also, because of their involvement, they are more likely to be willing to buy needed books, materials, and equipment. The "mother librarians" were given certificates of merit by the mayor of New Orleans for their work over a five-year period.

Parents of pupils in Midland Park, New Jersey, go to Godwin School every day as volunteers for routine work. They help the principal, school secretary, and teachers—on a schedule worked out a month in advance by the PTA president. The program also has the advantage of bringing parents into the school during the day and making them feel a part of the school program.

CHAPTER 9

# *The Bigger Job*

Public relations is more than parent relations. Citizens who don't have children in school vote on school matters, too. That is why the teacher is really "on stage" whenever and wherever he appears in the community—at a party, in the public library, in the supermarket, at a church picnic. The following tips will help teachers perform their important public relations role more effectively:

Try to have as much information as possible about the school system in mind. When someone asks, "Why don't they teach the alphabet any more?" or "Why do they need more money for schools *again?*" sound and straightforward answers can be given.

Don't pass along gossip about other members of the school staff or about students or their parents. Stories of this kind can sweep a community—and they usually gather size, scandal, and momentum as they go.

Don't express personal gripes about the principal, school policies, or other teachers where outsiders can hear. If a complaint is legitimate, take it to the persons involved.

Get involved in community drives and other group activities.

If there is a school or education association speakers bureau, volunteer your services. But don't try public speaking unless you have something to say and can say it effectively. If you make public talks infrequently, you'll probably do better with a manuscript or notes. Be sure to practice giving the talk beforehand! A speech is much more demanding than a classroom lecture.

## Developing Citizenship

Teachers are in a unique position not only to excite interest among parents in what is being done inside the school classrooms but also to

instill in parents an understanding of the citizenship goals to which the schools of America are committed.

A folder developed by the Cincinnati Public Schools, for example, tells parents what the schools are doing to develop good citizenship in the students, and advises parents what they can do to help at home. Reminding parents that the home shares responsibility with school and community for developing, cherishing, and preserving patriotism, it makes the following suggestions:

- Obtain a flag and fly it.
- Talk about and, when possible, visit national shrines.
- Explain the significance of patriotic occasions to the child.
- Read with the child about America.
- Watch telecasts which dramatize great events in the life of our country or its leaders, and discuss important news events.
- Help the child think critically about the goals of the United States.
- Let him assist in making family decisions.
- Show the child that you appreciate being an American, by voting and working for good legislation; respecting and upholding laws, and accepting civic responsibilities; and crusading for public well-being, with equal opportunity for all citizens.